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## **Building Beyond The Mediterranean Studying The Archives of European Businesses (1860-1970)**

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# The Fosfati archives

*Les archives de la Société égyptienne des phosphates*

**Antonella Cabassi**

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# The Fوسفati archives

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The archives of the Egyptian Phosphates Company are not and have never been comprehensive, due to the continuous changes in the company structure. Each administration produced its own set of documents, and the materials have rarely been reorganized and inventoried.

So far, our research has enabled us to identify the various company offices still maintaining valuable archives. Most of the collection is stored by Società Fوسفati administrative departments, now dispersed in various locations in both Italy and Egypt. There are also the personal and professional archives of individuals (such as managers, architects, and others) and specific collections stored in archives of public officials, institutions, and agencies delivering permits and authorizations.

The administrative Archives of the Società Egiziana per l'Estrazione e il Commercio dei Fوسفati is a part of the Historical Archives of Banco di Roma (Bank of Rome), and are conserved at the Palazzo del Monte di Pietà. However, restoration work on this building necessitated the temporary removal of the archives elsewhere, and not all collections are accessible. The material related to Fوسفati, hitherto unstudied, can be divided into more than forty subgroups. They have never been filed together as a single collection: the documents are scattered according to accounting heading or the department in charge. Papers cover the period between 1900 and 1961, which we have divided into three periods. The first, 1900-1912, documents the Banco



di Roma's participation in the phosphate business through its subsidiaries. The second, from 1912 to 1927, covers Banco di Roma's ownership of Fosfati. The third, 1927-1961, documents Fosfati's control by the Italian state via IRI<sup>432</sup> and the Institute of Liquidation, which administered Fosfati's nationalization and its later sale to the Egyptian Government. The archives also store correspondence related to financing granted to the Marconi Company in 1908, in order to establish a radiotelegraph station in Kosseir.

The IRI archives became the property of the IRI Foundation, set up when the IRI was closed. They contain the documents produced during the regular audits of Società Egiziana Fosfati (SEF) accounts. Covering the period between 1933 and the company's transfer to the Egyptian Government in 1961,<sup>433</sup> they are currently being digitized in preparation for their inclusion in the Italian Central State Archives database. The body of materials related to Fosfati is considerable, both in the Archivio Generale Pratiche Societarie - Numerazione Rossa (General Archives of Company Business - Red Notation), which are considered to be the official archives of the Institute, and in the Archivio II - Numerazione Nera (Archives II - Black Notation), consisting of branch office files. A valuable collection of visual materials contains pictures of supplies imported from Italy (pumps, turbines, generators, etc.) and maps of the mines. On the contrary, blueprints and plans for the construction works carried out in Kosseir are rare or missing; most of the records extant are accounting documents and inventories.

During the research, we were able to study the personal archives of Pellegrino Pellegrini, a teacher at the elementary school in Kosseir between 1931 and 1958, who was also a representative of the Italian Consul in Port Said and a secretary of the PNF (Partito Nazionale Fascista) in Kosseir. The archives, which are a sort of great diary on Africa, were preserved and enriched by Mr. Pelligrini's son Ilido, as a record of the lives of immigrants from the Agordo region to Egypt.<sup>434</sup>

Furthermore, it was possible to study the professional archives of Fosfati's manager, Riccardo Decima,<sup>435</sup> who worked in

Kosseir between 1921 and 1939. They contain drawings of mines, progress reports (on mining and construction works), estimates, correspondence, and photographs. The blueprints for the church built at Kosseir, however, are missing<sup>436</sup>.

We have also begun to probe the archives of the Sacred Congregation for the Eastern Churches<sup>437</sup> for documents regarding Kosseir. Further information may emerge in sources conserved by the Archives of the Franciscan Province of Egypt.

A preliminary survey carried out at the Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome has identified some interesting materials related to the Italian Embassy and Italian Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, which are worthy of further examination. The files analyzed thus far are devoid of pictures, but contain correspondence that facilitates our comprehension of the events.<sup>438</sup>